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ABSTRACT

Nine individual prosocial child behaviors of 2-year-olds were obtained from mothers and caretakers. These behaviors were combined into a fourfold scheme which was then used to assess child prosocial behavior outside a laboratory setting. In addition, the two dispositional attributes of sociability and happiness were assessed. Observations of 28 toddlers, ages 20 to 31 months, were made over a six-week period in both the home and in a play group setting. Data on child behavior were also obtained through questionnaires completed by mothers. When results were compared with studies of four- and five-year-olds, it was concluded that children may become less prosocial with age. There was also sufficient interrelatedness among the specific behaviors that it may be possible to view prosocial behavior as a coherent construct. Data also showed that obedience to adult requests stood empirically apart from other prosocial behaviors, suggesting that prosocial behavior involving adults may be qualitatively different from that involving peers. Finally, empathy also stood empirically apart from the other prosocial behaviors, suggesting that it may not be a critical component of, or precursor to, the display of prosocial behavior. (PCB)

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RELATIONS AMONG PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN TODDLERS

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The present study examined relations among prosocial behaviors in 2-year-olds. The nine prosocial behaviors selected for study were generated by asking caretakers to describe prosocial 2-year-olds of their acquaintance. Thus, only age-appropriate child behaviors were included. The nine individual child behaviors were combined into a four-fold scheme based on two criteria with two levels each: presence or absence of a rule, and presence or absence of another in distress (see Figure 1). Thus, prosocial behaviors that are elicited in a variety of contexts were systematically sampled.

Figure 1

Four-fold Scheme of Child's Prosocial Behaviors

	Another Person In Distress	No One In Distress
No Rule Present	COMPASSION 1. reacts empathically to anothers' distress 2. comforts others	AMIABILITY WITH PEERS 3. spontaneously shares 4. cooperates in play 5. enjoys others' pleasure 6. shares when requested 7. ensures equity for peers
Rule is Present	REMORSE 8. expresses remorse after hurting another	OBEDIENCE 9. complies with mother's commands

In addition to these prosocial behaviors, the two dispositional attributes of sociability and persisting state of happiness were assessed

because caretakers indicated that they may be an important component of prosocial interactions.

Data on child behavior were obtained through questionnaires completed by mothers and through observations made over a six-week period in both the home and a play group setting. After passing basic tests of reliability and validity, scores from different instruments assessing the same behavior were collapsed into a single score for that behavior (Bergin, 1986). Thus, scores for each of the nine child behaviors were constructed from both observations and questionnaires, with few exceptions, in order to better represent each construct and reduce reliance on particular methodological procedures.

Subjects were 28 firstborn, homereared children between 20 and 31 months of age (M = 24 months, SD = 2.6 months). Families were primarily Caucasian, of semi-professional or professional status, nuclear, and intact.

RESULTS

Frequency of Prosocial Behavior

This study demonstrates that 2-year-olds do display prosocial behavior, in spite of their reputation for egocentrism. It is interesting to note in Table 1 how the frequency of various prosocial behaviors for this sample of 2-year-olds compares with the frequency of similar behaviors reported by Eisenberg-Berg and Hand (1979) and Eisenberg-Berg and Lennon (1980) in studies involving 4- and 5-year-olds in peer group settings. The assessment techniques and observation settings are similar, but not strictly comparable, across these three studies. These results suggest that younger children may actually engage in more prosocial acts in a peer-group setting than do older children.

Table 1

Average Frequency of Prosocial Behavior
in Peer Group Settings
(In Acts per Minute)

	Eisenberg-Berg & Hand (1979)	Eisenberg-Berg & Lennon (1980)	Present Study
	4- & 5-year-olds		2-year-olds
Requested Sharing	.003	.003	.007
Spontaneous Sharing	.012	.003	.048
Comforting	----	.001	.067
Helping	----	.012	.015
Comforting/Helping	.025	-----	----
Cooperation	----	.002	.204
Total Prosocial (without Cooperation)	.045	.018	.145
Positive Sociability	.66	.635	.836

Note: The Eisenberg-Berg and Hand (1979) study involved a minimum of 140 minutes of observation across 6-11 weeks. The children were between 48-63 months and were White and middle class; N = 35. The Eisenberg and Lennon (1980) study involved 160 minutes of observation across 10 weeks. The children had a mean age of 56 months and were White and middle class; N = 51. The present study involved a median of 42 minutes of observation (range = 28-67 minutes) across 6 weeks. The children had a mean age of 24 months and were mostly White and middle class; N = 28.

Group Differences: Sex and Age

Age was not significantly correlated with any of the child variables, including those assessed in the group setting away from mothers. This latter observation is important because some toddlers can experience separation anxiety in this kind of situation.

Girls tended to display somewhat more prosocial behavior in all categories; however, these sex differences were not statistically

significant. The non-significant trend was strongest for the empathy and comforting scores and for the four composite variables.

Relations Between Demographic Variables and Child Prosocial Behavior

Most variables descriptive of the family setting are not related to child prosocial behavior (i.e., mother's age and education, child development courses taken by the mother, number of children). In contrast, variables reflecting children's social contacts are related to the prosocial behaviors that involve interaction with peers (i.e., time spent with mother, time mother spends with other toddlers, number of hours mother works, and number of hours the child is in a group setting).

Relations Among Child Prosocial Behavior Variables

There was considerable interrelatedness among the different prosocial behaviors (see Table 2). Most of the variables were positively correlated with each of the other variables to some degree, and overall they appeared to represent a coherent domain of prosocial behavior. The two variables that were somewhat more isolated were empathy and obedience to mother.

The relationship between the prosocial behavior variables and both sociability and happiness was strong. Happiness and sociability were also significantly related to each other (r = .74, p = .001). The profile of correlations between sociability and prosocial behavior is not surprising, and simply indicates that most prosocial behaviors involve a degree of social interaction.

Three additional points of interest in Table 2 are: 1) Empathy was unrelated to happiness. Apparently children who respond empathically may have either a positive, neutral, or negative dispositional valence. 2) Obedience is somewhat negatively associated with both happiness and

Table 2

Correlations Among Child Prosocial Behaviors

	Spontaneous Sharing	Enjoys Others' Pleasure	Ensures Equity for Peers	Cooperative in Play	Requested Sharing	Empathy	Comforts Others	Remorseful	Sociability	Happiness
Spontaneous Sharing									.27	.46***
Enjoys Others' Pleasure	.59***								.53***	.69***
Ensures Equity for Peers	.30*	.40**							.49***	.47***
Cooperative in Play	.63***	.68***	.47***						.62***	.80***
Requested Sharing	.21	.16	.60***	.30*					.47**	.48***
Empathy	.26	-.10	.10	.13	.00				.35**	-.02
Comforts Others	.41**	.49***	.67***	.50***	.32*	.56***			.64***	.46**
Remorseful	.31*	.29*	.46***	.52***	.41**	.36**	.49***		.47**	.34**
Obedient	.09	-.11	.08	-.17	-.02	.11	.38**	.01	-.26	-.31*

Note: Numbers presented are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Significance levels are based on a one-tailed test.
* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

sociability. It appears that the sociable, exuberant toddlers are especially resistant to changing their behavior at their mothers' request. 3) Children's enjoyment of others' pleasure, a response to others' happiness, does not correlate with empathy, a response to others' sadness. Similar results were obtained by Feshbach (1982), who found that grade-school boys who empathized strongly in dysphoric situations were not the same individuals as those who empathized strongly in euphoric situations.

The literature on interrelations among different prosocial behaviors is sparse and mixed. Examples of results from other studies include Eisenberg-Berg and Hand's (1979) finding that helping/comforting and sociability were positively correlated ($r = .33$, $p < .05$), but that sharing and both sociability and comforting were uncorrelated in observations of 35 preschoolers. Bryant and Crockenberg (1980) found that comforting, sharing, and helping were not related to each other in laboratory tasks involving a sample of 50 mother-daughter-daughter triads. Eisenberg-Berg and Lennon (1980) found that empathy correlated negatively with spontaneous sharing and helping/comforting, but was not associated with requested sharing in an observational study of 51 preschoolers.

In the few studies such as these that have included indices of different prosocial behaviors, correlations have ranged from 0 to moderate in magnitude. (For reviews see Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler & Chapman, 1983; Underwood & Moore, 1982). In this context, the results presented here are especially striking. These results confirm Radke-Yarrow et al.'s (1983) perception that generally, in studies where higher correlations have been found, prosocial behavior has been assessed over an extended period of time, in naturalistic observations, using composite, rather than single item, measures of prosocial behavior. In addition to meeting these conditions, the high degree of interrelatedness observed here may be due to

a key strength of this study: only prosocial behaviors that were known to be evident in the targeted age group were included (Bergin, in preparation).

Relations among the four categories of child prosocial behavior are even stronger than those for the individual variables (see Table 3). The correlations among the prosocial behavior categories are given both with and without the child's dispositional happiness and sociability scores partialed out. This was done because many of the prosocial behavior variables were significantly related to one or both of these two attributes. Therefore it seemed likely that some of the shared variance among the prosocial behavior measures would simply be a function of their mutual relationship to both sociability and happiness.

Table 3

Correlations Among Child Prosocial Behavior Composite Variables

	Compassion	Amiability	Obedience	Sociability	Happiness
Compassion				.52***	.24
Amiability	.47*** .38**			.65***	.78***
Obedience	.29* .44**	-.06 .34*		-.26	-.31*
Remorse	.51*** .46***	.55*** .50***	.01 .18	.47**	.34**

Note: The first number presented is the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The second number presented is the correlation coefficient with the child's happiness score partialed out. All significance levels are based on a one-tailed test.
* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

However, the correlations presented in Table 3 reveal that the relationships among the prosocial behavior composites are not attributable to a common correlation with sociability or happiness; in fact, these two variables actually reduce the magnitude of the correlations between obedience and the other prosocial behavior variables. The interpretation of these results is necessarily speculative at this point. Perhaps some children who do not have a strong prosocial orientation manifest higher levels of prosocial behavior because of their bouyant spirits or higher quantity of social interactions. Thus, their scores on the prosocial behavior variables that involve a high degree of social activity are elevated, but their scores on those that do not involve such activity (i.e., obedience) are unaffected.

While both happiness and sociability were significantly correlated with the prosocial behavior measures and with each other, sociability did not contribute unique information to the observed pattern of empirical relationships. Partialing out happy disposition alone revealed as much of the underlying relationship as partialing out both happiness and sociability.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study that are significant to the literature on prosocial development include the following:

1) The study has pointed out the possibility that children may become less prosocial with age, at least for those prosocial behaviors indexed in this study that are comparable to those used in the studies by Eisenberg-Berg and Hand (1979) and Eisenberg-Berg and Lennon (1980).

2) These results suggest that there is sufficient interrelatedness

to view prosocial behavior as a coherent construct, particularly if the child's persisting affective state is taken into account. Such unity within the domain of prosocial behavior has generally not been observed by other researchers. It appears that historically the literature may have underestimated the interrelatedness of different types of prosocial behavior, at least at this age, because of a failure to consider the strong links between arousal and prosocial behavior. The high degree of interrelatedness of the prosocial behaviors may also be due to the inclusion in this study of only those behaviors known to be components of 2-year-olds' prosocial behavior.

Salzstein (1976) argues that in order to make sense of the diverse findings in research on moral development it is necessary to distinquish different kinds of morality. One distinction he draws is morality as conformity to rules in deference to authority vs. morality as consideration for others. This is similar to one of the distinctions present in the four-fold scheme. Eisenberg (1982) has indicated that cognitions involved in different types of prosocial behavior may be quite different and hence unrelated. However, in this study diverse prosocial behaviors were positively related.

3) Obedience stood empirically apart from the other prosocial behaviors, suggesting that prosocial behavior involving adults versus peers may be qualitatively different.

4) Empathy also stood empirically apart from the other prosocial behaviors, suggesting that it may not be a critical component of, or precursor to, the display of prosocial behavior.

5) A final contribution of this study is the piloting of a new instrument for assessing child prosocial behavior, the Child Prosocial Behavior Inventory. This questionnaire proved to be reliable when

completed by both observers and mothers. Its validity is supported by the fact that it was derived from mothers' and caretakers' free descriptions of actual 2-year-olds' prosocial behavior (Bergin, in preparation). It offers a potentially useful alternative to studying prosocial behavior in the artificial laboratory setting. This is an important alternative, since Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1982) found that young children react more, and differently, to real distress than to simulated distress. They also react with greater frequency and sophistication to the distress of their mothers than to adult experimenters.

This study has some important limitations, the most obvious of which are its limited sample size and the homogeneity of the sample. Thus, the findings reported above cannot be regarded as a definitive description of all children. However, they do provide a plausible description of prosocial behavior in toddlers, and present suggestions for future research on other populations in different settings.

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